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Re-Thinking the Value of 20th-Century Archaeological Sites in Canada

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Abstract

Though archaeological sites dating to the 20th century in Ontario are eligible for protection under the recently updated *Standards and Guidelines for Consulting Archaeologists*, many archaeologists do not consider them to valuable heritage resources. In academic archaeology in other parts of Canada, however, 20th-century sites have proven to be useful in archaeological research in several ways. This paper will discuss how 20th-century archaeological sites are investigated in Ontario, and then compare case studies from academic archaeology in the Yukon, British Columbia, and Newfoundland and Labrador where recent archaeological sites were found to be valuable to both archaeological research and to modern descendant communities. These case studies suggest that the attitudes and practices of consultant archaeologists may not be reflective of the potential value of 20th-century archaeological sites in Ontario.

Keywords

cultural resource management, historic archaeology

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Within the cultural resource management (CRM) industry of Ontario, historical archaeological sites dating to the early 20th-century are not commonly considered to be valuable heritage resources. Growing trends in archaeology outside of CRM indicate that 20th-century archaeological sites can provide valuable information to research, particularly regarding subaltern groups that are not traditionally represented in historical records (Beck and Somerville 2005; Chenoweth 2009; Hall 1999; Silliman 2010). In addition, archaeologists have demonstrated that their abilities to interpret material culture are not restricted to very ancient contexts, but can even be used to study modern peoples (Rathje and Murphy 2001; Zimmerman et al. 2010). In this paper I will discuss the attitudes and perceptions in Ontario CRM towards 20th-century historical archaeology, as well as the recently updated *Standards and Guidelines for Consulting Archaeologists* (Ministry of Tourism and Culture 2011) in regard to their policies on 20th-century archaeological sites. In contrast I will present three examples of 20th-century archaeological sites in other areas of Canada that have made meaningful contributions to our understanding of the past. I will demonstrate that archaeological sites from recent historical time periods can be useful to archaeological research in several ways. In doing so, I urge CRM archaeologists in Ontario to re-evaluate their attitudes and perceptions of 20th-century archaeological sites.

Background

Historical archaeology has been practiced for several decades in Ontario. Mirroring trends in broader Canadian archaeology, historical archaeology carried out in Ontario prior to the 1970s was heavily centered on sites of grand national narratives, such as early contact sites, forts, military sites, and fur trade posts (Doroszenko 2009). The 1970s boom in development and subsequently in CRM archaeology significantly altered the ways that archaeologists approached their work (Ferris 2002). As increasingly more historical sites were investigated, archaeologists established more regional practices that dealt with historical sites rather than grand sites of national importance throughout Ontario and the rest of Canada (Doroszenko 2009).

Although more historical sites were encountered in CRM work in the last four decades, professional archaeologists often dismissed them as irrelevant or unimportant to archaeological research. In a review of historical archaeology in Ontario CRM over the last several decades, Ferris (2007) discussed the perceptions of recent historical archaeological materials among CRM professionals. He found that prior to the efforts of Thomas and Ian Kenyon in the mid-1980s to promote the importance of 19th-century domestic sites in Ontario, very few archaeologists considered recent historical sites to be valuable or valid research topics. By the early 2000s, more CRM archaeologists were regularly investigating historical sites, but attitudes towards sites dating to the 19th and 20th centuries had not changed significantly (Ferris 2007). Ferris also noted that while some CRM archaeologists of younger generations were more likely to value 19th- and 20th-century archaeological sites, older generations and non-historical period specialists expressed disinterest and

investigated sites without reflective thought towards the archaeological remains with which they were engaging.

The lack of interest in recent historical archaeology likely stems from several sources. Firstly, a lack of training and education in historical archaeology appears to play a significant role in the development of this attitude. Within Canadian universities, training and education in archaeology have focused on prehistoric time periods. Though most anthropology or archaeology departments in Canadian universities now have faculty specializing in historical archaeology, formal programs specializing in historical time periods have yet to be established (Doroszenko 2009). In effect, archaeologists not only fail to appreciate historical archaeology as a research topic, but they also fail to learn the skills, such as archival research, that are crucial to understanding historical sites. Secondly, dismissive attitudes were influenced by earlier trends in historical archaeological research. As archaeologists in the past associated historical archaeology with earlier contact periods or grand nationalistic sites, they were more likely to view recent sites as less important, or in the words of Ian Kenyon (1986:41), "that historic crap." Finally, Doroszenko (2009) has noted that a lack of provincial support has been a roadblock for promoting historical research interests in archaeology, both in a lack of funding for heritage and in weak or outdated legislation regarding heritage resources.

Though many archaeologists in Ontario continue to hold dismissive attitudes, revisions in the *Standards and Guidelines* now allow for the protection of recent archaeological sites, which can include those from the 20th century. Specifically, new cut-off dates for recent historical sites were established based on a survey of CRM archaeologists in Ontario (Ferris 2007). Section 3.4 states that all post-contact sites dating to before 1830 must be mitigated, while homesteads dating to post-1830 require mitigation only if 80% of their occupation occurred before 1870 or if they are "associated with the first generation of settlement of a pioneer or cultural group, even when the settlement was after 1870" (Ministry of Tourism and Culture 2011:69). For more recent sites, section 3.4 now states that late 19th- and 20th-century archaeological sites require mitigation when "background research (from any stage) or archaeological features clearly document cultural heritage value or interest" (Ministry of Tourism and Culture 2011:57).

The new *Standards and Guidelines* include many definitions of cultural heritage value or interest that can be applied to 20th-century archaeological sites. Criteria for these definitions of value include a site's (a) association with oral histories of a community, Aboriginal community, or specific group or family, (b) association with a significant historical event (cultural, economic, military, religious, social or political), (c) contribution to the testing of experimental archaeological techniques, (d) usefulness for comparison with similar archaeological sites in other areas, and (e) contributions to enhancing the public's understanding and appreciation of Ontario's past (Ministry of Tourism and Culture 2011:60-61). Other criteria may also apply to historical archaeological sites, but these are highlighted as they are useful in the discussion of the case studies below.

In many ways, additional criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest open new doors to historical archaeology in Ontario. According to Ferris (2007), these new criteria allow consultants to argue for the protection or excavation of later (including 20th-century) sites, which

was unheard-of in land-based archaeology in the previous two decades of CRM in Ontario. These additional criteria allow archaeologists to excavate or preserve archaeological sites that may not have previously been protected, such as non-domestic sites or sites that are associated with cultural groups that migrated to Canada in the early 20th-century. The criteria also allow consultants to approach historical Aboriginal sites, which have been largely ignored in North American historical archaeology (Rubertone 2000). At the same time, recent historical sites are still regulated by the attitudes and opinions of CRM archaeologists. Ferris (2007) suspects that in most cases consultants continue with their rote, non-reflexive practices and simply use 1870 as a cut-off for non-Aboriginal archaeological sites without considering the other ways in which 19th and 20th-century sites may be useful to archaeological research.

Yukon Gold Rush

To explore some of the ways that 20th-century archaeological sites can be meaningful to our understanding of the past, I will examine three case studies from other areas in Canada. These sites, though not in Ontario, meet many of the criteria used to designate heritage value or interest in the *Standards and Guidelines.* The first case study includes sites from the Klondike gold rush of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Parks Canada (2012) considers the gold rush era to be of utmost importance to Yukon history and holds many annual celebrations to commemorate them. Because the definition of archaeological resources in the Yukon *Historic Resources Act* (Yukon Tourism and Culture 2002:45) is "abandoned objects that are older than 45 years," gold rush sites are protected by law and regularly investigated by archaeologists.

In the early 1980s Parks Canada archaeologist Marc Stevenson investigated some archaeological sites in the Kluane region of the Yukon including Bullion Creek, where gold was discovered in the fall of 1903 (Stevenson 1982). Miners settled in Bullion Creek, built cabins and worked through the winter. Poor weather in the following spring prompted a quick, collective evacuation of the settlers to Burwash Creek 65 km to the northwest. Miners left Bullion Creek with the intention of returning when the water level had fallen; however, mining conditions were better in Burwash Creek and the camps and cabins of Bullion Creek were not occupied again. The other site investigated was Mush Creek, where miners from Alaska followed rumors of gold and set up camps from 1897-1899 (Stevenson 1982). As they worked, the Mush Creek miners realized there was not enough gold to sustain work and the camps were gradually abandoned. The Bullion Creek and Mush Creek sites were abandoned in different ways under different circumstances: the former was rapid, with a planned return on the part of the occupants, while the latter was gradual, with no intended return (Stevenson 1982).

It was these phenomena that Stevenson sought to document through archaeological study. By the early 1980s many processual era archaeologists had posited models of site abandonment, where certain types of site abandonment activities could be observed and applied in cross-cultural settings (Stevenson 1982). The Bullion and Mush Creek sites provided a good opportunity to test these models, due largely to their relatively recent occupation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As details about the gold fields were published in *The Daily Evening Star* in Whitehorse, Stevenson (1982) was able to interpret archaeological materials with written sources as additional lines of evidence. The

conclusions of Stevenson's report were straightforward: when people quickly leave a site expecting to return, their sites contain more functioning and valuable artifacts, less refuse within houses, and more items that are cached, stored, and protected. Alternately, when people gradually abandon a site, their sites have significantly fewer functioning or valuable items, much greater quantities of refuse items in different spatial patterns, and much fewer cached items (Stevenson 1982).

Stevenson was able to identify detailed trends of spatial patterns of materials within camps that could be applied to the study of other gold mining sites. As a processual archaeologist, he also considered the ways these patterns might be applicable to site-abandonment processes in other types of archaeological sites (Stevenson 1982). The example demonstrates that 20th-century archaeological sites can provide an excellent opportunity to find comparison sites and to test archaeological models and hypotheses, as they are more likely to have multiple lines of evidence.

Ewan Cannery

The next case study took place on the Lower Mainland of British Columbia in the first few decades of the 20th-century. Douglas Ross (2009) investigated the material lives of first generation Chinese labourers and Japanese fishermen at a salmon cannery along the Fraser River in British Columbia, ca. 1900-1930. His primary data came from archaeological investigations of ethnically segregated work camps at the Ewan Cannery in combination with archival resources, historical research, and excavation results from similar sites in western North America (Ross 2009:2). Under the British Columbia *Historic Conservation Act* (Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations 1996), protected archaeological sites are defined as anything containing artifacts, features, materials or other physical evidence of human habitation or use before 1846.

Archaeological research was a necessary component in this project, as the lives and experiences of immigrant groups are not adequately reflected in the official historical record. Through the mid-19th century and into the mid-20th century, both Chinese and Japanese peoples immigrated to Canada as labourers, working on railroads, mines, in laundries, and other businesses. Only Chinese men were usually permitted to immigrate to Canada, and increasingly expensive head taxes were charged to discourage Chinese men from sending for their wives and families (Ross 2009). The provincial government of British Columbia passed legislation that kept Chinese labourers, including those born in Canada, from accessing certain jobs, voting, holding office, becoming Canadian citizens, and earning wages equal to Canadians of European heritage (Ross 2009). The Euro-Canadian majority was largely hostile to Chinese populations, accusing them of deflating wages and associating them with perceived social ills such as prostitution, gambling, opium smoking, and poor hygiene (Ross 2009). Japanese labourers began immigrating to Canada at the beginning of the 20th century under similar conditions. However, unlike the Chinese, Japanese men were permitted to come to Canada with their wives and families, and many Japanese communities were formed around labour camps and canneries (Ross 2009). The provincial government and Euro-Canadian majority continued to be hostile towards Japanese populations, culminating in riots and the eventual internment of Japanese peoples during the Second World War (Ross 2009).

With this cultural and historical setting in mind, Ross investigated the archaeological remains of residential structures on the Don and Lion Islands of the Ewan Cannery on the Fraser River. There are some historical sources dealing with the communities of Chinese and Japanese migrants, though most are considered to be fictionalized and not fully representative of the lives and experiences of migrant labourers (Ross 2009). Archaeological research was used to help to fill gaps in this historical record. Ross's investigation of material culture at Chinese bunkhouses and Japanese communities suggested that the labourers were supplied with food from their employers and given little choice about what they consumed. Beverages, on the other hand, were purchased by individuals in the community. Consumption of beer, wine, liquor, soda, and *sake* informed Ross on how inhabitants constructed identity in transnational migratory settings. The labourers consumed a mixture of both Asian and European beverages, but the ways that they consumed the drinks were similar to the class- and gender-based traditions in Asia, rather than the traditions of the dominant Euro-Canadian population (Ross 2009). The mix of local and traditional influences seen in the Ewan Cannery residences suggests that the ways in which migrant groups preserve traditions while taking on new and local activities is complex and not reflected in the historical records dealing with these groups.

The Ewan cannery archaeological sites meet several criteria for heritage value and importance as defined by the *Standards and Guidelines*. For example, they are associated with oral histories of a community and significant historical events on the Lower Mainland, such as the Vancouver Riot of 1907 when protestors stormed through the Chinese and Japanese communities issuing threats and damaging property (Ross 2009). Most importantly, the Ewan Cannery sites contribute to enhancing the public's understanding and appreciation of the past. This type of investigation is especially important to the study of Canadian history, as it challenges homogeneous ideas about Canadian immigrants and the "Europeanization" of other ethnic groups (Ross 2009).

Sandwich Bay

The final case study took place in an early 20th-century Inuit-Métis community in Sandwich Bay, Labrador that was investigated by Laura Kelvin in 2010 and 2011. It is necessary to acknowledge that Labrador was part of the Dominion of Newfoundland, a self-governing colony of Britain, until 1949; however, its history should be considered no less a part of Canada's history than the pre-Confederation eras of other provinces. Modern Newfoundland and Labrador law defines archaeological materials as objects showing evidence of manufacture, alteration, or use by humans that have valuable information associated with prehistoric or historic groups (Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation 1990). Within archaeological investigations in the province, sites dating to before 1960 are classified as archaeological while sites after 1960 are ethnographic.

In the early 20th century there were a number of rural Inuit-Métis peoples living in the Sandwich Bay area who were disconnected from the British settlements on Newfoundland. The Spanish Influenza hit Labrador in 1918, killing a quarter of the residents of Sandwich Bay, most of whom were adults and parents (Kelvin 2011). The Newfoundland government did not send the requested medical aid during the illness, but later set up the Labrador Public School, a residential school that housed the children who had been orphaned. The official historical records and oral histories from

Inuit-Métis Sandwich Bay residents regarding these events are at odds with one another (Kelvin 2011). The official records state that children were treated kindly and encouraged to preserve traditional activities, but oral histories indicate that children were physically abused. One feature, The Crying Rock, remains in the collective memory of the Sandwich Bay community as a place where children would go to cry when the school administrators punished them. An even more telling example is the story of a student who was frustrated with the abuse and burnt down the Labrador Public School in 1928.

Kelvin's investigations at Sandwich Bay included archaeological survey in combination with oral histories. The oral history component was especially important in this case, as the memories of the Spanish Influenza and the Labrador Public School have had a long-lasting effect on the residents of Sandwich Bay (Kelvin 2011). Inuit-Métis residents assisted Kelvin's surveys and she was able to document homesteads of families affected by illness and the Labrador Public School. Artifacts collected from the ground surface helped to date the occupations and add another line of evidence to the oral histories. Kelvin (2011) argued that further archaeological investigations into local sites would lead to a better understanding of how Sandwich Bay people lived through a sad but historically significant time, while coping with illness, neglect from government bodies, and abuse in school.

Though occupied in the 20th century, the Sandwich Bay sites are valuable sources of information about the lives of marginalized people in Canada. They meet several criteria of archaeological value as defined in the *Standards and Guidelines*, such as their association with oral histories and Aboriginal communities. The Labrador Public School is associated with significant historical events such as the opening and later burning of a residential school, while the residential sites are associated with the Spanish Influenza. The sites also contribute significantly to enhancing the public's understanding and appreciation of the past. By working with the descendent community members, Kelvin was able to produce results that were deeply significant to the residents of the modern Sandwich Bay communities.

Discussion

The case studies presented in this paper clearly meet at least some of the criteria for cultural heritage value or interest as defined in the Ontario *Standards and Guidelines* that are mentioned above, despite being recent historical sites. The Yukon gold rush camps, Ewan Cannery camps, and Sandwich Bay sites all have associations with historical groups and events, and they contribute to the understanding and appreciation of their area's pasts that are not reflected in official historical records. It is also important to note that while the Yukon gold rush and Sandwich Bay sites met their province or territory's definition of archaeological resources based on age, the Ewan Cannery sites were much more recent than the defined age for heritage resource protection in British Columbia. This suggests that legislation regarding the required antiquity for heritage conservation may not always be the best representative of value in the archaeological record.

In light of these examples from academic archaeology, it may be prudent to reconsider how we think about 20th-century archaeological sites in Ontario CRM. Though the case studies were from other parts of Canada, there are a variety of 20th-century heritage sites in Ontario that are similar in nature, such as homesteads, labour camps, and residential schools, that may be of significant value to our understanding of

the past. In CRM it is always a challenge to strike a balance between the client, the archaeology, and the descendent communities. Given the pressures that consultants face to turn projects around as quickly as possible at the best price for the client, it is often convenient enough to not recommend Stage 4 mitigation or further study for more recent historical sites; however, this practice does not necessarily reflect the needs of archaeology or descendent communities. As noted by Ferris (2002, 2007), CRM projects dominate the total number of sites investigated in Ontario each year. In effect, the results of CRM investigations shape the landscape of Ontario archaeology. By disregarding 20th-century sites, CRM archaeologists may be doing a great disservice to the needs of archaeology in Ontario. In addition, this practice may not meet the needs of descendent communities who can benefit greatly in many ways from the investigations of recent archaeological sites.

Conclusion

Through this review, I have provided some examples of how archaeological investigations of 20th-century sites have contributed significant information in their own historical contexts, with the objective of encouraging archaeologists to question their attitudes towards 20th-century sites in Ontario. While it is premature to recommend ways that legislation can better suit the needs of 20th-century historical archaeology, it is crucial for CRM archaeologists to approach recent historical archaeological sites in Ontario with reflexivity and open minds to the ways that these sites can provide useful data and relevant research topics to the study of the past. As noted by both Ferris (2007) and Doroszenko (2009), the number of archaeologists specializing in historical periods in Ontario is slowly increasing; future collaboration between historical specialists and CRM archaeologists may be the most important step towards a more comprehensive body of knowledge of Ontario history. This collaboration will allow CRM archaeologists to approach and interpret individual sites more reflexively and within greater regional contexts, rather than viewing them simply as more of the same. By examining dismissive attitudes and rote practices, CRM archaeologists will be able to give 20th-century archaeological sites in Ontario a well-deserved second look.

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